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SOURCE Alik.MEANS USED TO REPATRIATE ARMENIANS TO THE USSR

A series of articles in Alik, a Dashnak daily newspaper published in Tehran between 24 and 29 September 1952, describes in detail the means Armenian local officials in Iran are using to repatriate the Armenians in that country to the USSR. The following is a summary of the highlights of these articles.

Numbers in parentheses refer to appended sources.⁷

The Armenian Central Repatriation Committee and its field representatives, who made the arrangements for repatriating Iranian Armenians to the Armenian SSR, have done everything in their power to rob and confuse the people. Repatriation field workers, strangers to Iran, were sent to Peria [unidentified, possibly Barai], Sultanabad, Purvar [unidentified, possibly Pulvar] and Chehar Mahal to urge the Armenian peasants to sell their property and get ready for departure to the "fatherland."

These workers organized local councils composed of Communists and fellow-travelers, both to carry out unscrupulous orders and also to give sanctions to the exploitation on their part of the local Armenians. Some of the orders which they gave to the peasants were as follows: to give these agents the authority to sell the peasants' property, to pay 700-1,000 rials per each married couple as a fee, to turn over to the agents the peasants' sugar and tea rations, to sell cattle and livestock to certain designated persons, and to turn over to the agents the school funds. They announced that those who did not obey these regulations would be branded as traitors and barred from entry to the Armenian SSR.

The patriotic peasants, believing that they would realize their dream to return to the fatherland, accepted these ruthless acts of the repatriation officials without protest. (2) Thousands of farmers, property owners, and peasants who had lived in these regions for 350 years, were thus made homeless and destitute. Having sold their property for a nominal sum,

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they congregated in Tehran, ready for repatriation, but the officials postponed action from day to day, compelling the homeless people to roam in the streets of Tehran begging for their daily livelihood.(1)

After suffering for several months under these wretched conditions, the peasants moved enmasse on the offices of the Central Repatriation Committee in the hope of bringing pressure on the committee and thus forcing it to carry out its promise of repatriation. The committee had the audacity to demand that each peasant pay an additional sum of 300-400 rials for the repatriation expenses, despite the fact that it knew very well that repatriation had ceased. The stipulated amount was raised through the generous contribution of the Armenians of Iran so that their poor, destitute compatriots might settle in the Armenian SSR.(2)

After collecting these additional funds, the committee not only ignored the peasants' demands for repatriation but failed to give them any assistance to alleviate their plight, and soon after, it announced that because of cold weather, repatriation had ceased. The committee also started to circulate rumors to the effect that certain Armenians who were against the repatriation movement had incited the Iranian government to raise obstacles against repatriation but that the committee was negotiating with the government and that it hoped to remove these obstacles. However, the refugee peasants, who did not trust the committee any longer, had given up all hope of repatriation. Hungry and destitute and unable to control their wrath against the organizers of the resettlement movement, they mobbed the Central Repatriation Committee's offices. Following this, the committee members closed their offices and disappeared with the millions of rials they had collected from the peasants under the pretext of repatriating them to the Armenian SSR.(3)

The AGBU [Armenian General Benevolent Union, a philanthropic organization with branches in the Armenian communities in the Diaspora], whose contribution of 360,000 rials was also embezzled by the Central Repatriation Committee, came to the assistance of the peasants by appropriating for their relief an additional sum of 3 million rials. This fund was intended at first to help resettle the peasants in their home towns and villages. However, Communists and progressives who had been working with the Repatriation Committee infiltrated into AGBU ranks and blocked its efforts in this direction. On the other hand, through intimidation, they forced the poor refugees to settle in the outskirts of Tehran, where living conditions were extremely unfavorable and unsanitary, and where even the local farmers were unable to eke out a living. The Communists had made an agreement with the landlords of this area whereby they would receive a fee for each agricultural worker delivered to these landlords. Furthermore, the Communists believed that if the peasants remained hungry, destitute, and helpless, and completely under their influence, both physically and mentally, they would be more amenable to Communist propaganda and become tools in subversive activities.(4)

The young doctors of the physician's section of the Union of the Armenian University Men of Tehran took over the care of the sick and distributed medicine, other supplies, and even food among the destitute. The Armenian community of Tehran backed these efforts and contributed generously toward this project. However, the officials who had been connected with the repatriation plan tried to block these efforts to prevent the other Armenians from knowing the conditions of the people in the disease-infected area.(5)

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SOURCES

1. Tehran, Alik, 24 Sep 52
2. Ibid. 25 Sep 52
3. Ibid., 26 Sep 52
4. Ibid., 28 Sep 52
5. Ibid., 29 Sep 52

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